

**Homily for the 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**St. Thomas the Apostle Church – West Springfield, Massachusetts**  
**August 25, 2019**



Scripture Readings: [Isaiah 66:18-21](#) ✕ [Psalm 117: 1-2](#) ✕ [Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13](#) ✕ [Luke 13:22-29](#)

There is a *Peanuts* cartoon that shows Charlie Brown getting up one morning and looking out the window. It's a beautiful winter day: Snow is covering the ground and it's very cold but it's perfect for skiing. So, Charlie bundles up in several layers of clothing. He then puts on his big gloves and his skis. When he moves toward the door, he finds that he's too bundled up to get through the door. But, instead of removing the items that are preventing him from getting out the door, he stands there and screams at the top of his lungs.

The image of Charlie Brown standing in front of the door too bundled up to pass through it, is a good image for us to remember as we meet the challenge that Jesus gives us today. There are many things that might make it very difficult for us to pass through that narrow gate to the kingdom of heaven. They may be spiritual things or material things but, whatever they are, they are things that keep our hearts and our focus from the loving and merciful presence of God in our midst.

Perhaps too, the thing that might keep us from the kingdom of heaven is the expectations of others. A good story to illustrate this point involves Joe Rosenthal, the photographer who took the famous photo in World War II of the United States Marines raising the American Flag on the island of Iwo Jima.

Joe was a Jewish man who became convinced that Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah. He decided to convert to Catholicism. His family and friends thought this was a terrible

mistake but Joe's faith in Jesus burned in his heart. He knew that his decision was right, and he knew that he had to go against the wishes of those who loved him most. This was a very difficult and painful task.

After World War II, in an interview, Joe talked about his work as a photographer and he also talked about his faith in Jesus and how it helped him during the difficult years on the battlefields. Referring to his conversion to Catholicism, Joe said that he realized that "sometimes the thing that keeps us from entering the door to God's kingdom is not just material possessions and concerns, but also [concerns about] what others may say about us or think of us."

Indeed, it's very important to most of us that others think well of us. Jesus warns us that we need to stand by the truth; we need to speak out and live out the Gospel, regardless of sacrifice, suffering, or even rejection at the hands of those we love most, if we are to walk through that narrow gate. This is what He was referring to in our Gospel last week when he spoke about family members turning against one another because of His message. He is saying that as important as our relationships are, Gospel living and the kingdom of God are infinitely more important.

As we bring today's Scripture to prayer this week, may we be mindful of those bundles, those burdens, that keep us from being all that God has called us to be. May we ask God for the true freedom we need to be children of God who walk freely toward God's kingdom of love. ✕